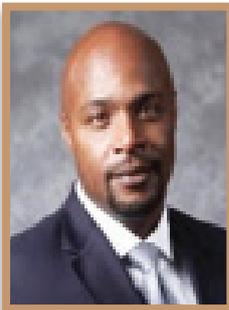


2018 NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Human and Civil Rights Award Winner

◆ Rodney Ellis, Sr. ◆

César Chávez Acción y Compromiso Human and Civil Rights Awards



Rodney Ellis, Sr., believed that a world-class education opens doors for students. Throughout his life he worked to ensure that students and educators across North Carolina, especially in underserved communities, received the resources they needed to provide that education. As a teacher, union leader and champion for students and educators, Ellis embodied the César Chávez Acción y Compromiso Human and Civil Rights Awards, which this year is awarded posthumously.

Ellis served in many leadership roles in the North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE), and it was his undeniable love for and appreciation of education that helped him guide NCAE through some of its most challenging times as members endured politically motivated attacks on public education.

Rodney Ellis worked quietly behind the scenes. In an effort to protect public education, he continued to dialogue with lawmakers in Raleigh. It was only when it became clear that lawmakers were set on a continued assault on public education that Ellis called for his fellow educators, parents and students to join an education-focused Moral Monday March and civil disobedience action in the halls of the legislative building in Raleigh. He organized and thousands joined in.

"You see, Rodney knew that public education made a difference in his life and would be the greatest difference for students in need. He constantly spoke out, fought for funding, and battled with the North Carolina Legislature. But that is truly just the tip of the iceberg...Rodney even went to jail to bring awareness to the terrible cuts to education that were being proposed in the North Carolina Legislature. This great man truly talked the talk and walked the walk," said another friend and colleague Dale Lee, West Virginia Education Association President.

As Ellis completed his second-term as president of NCAE he reflected on his work and legacy, "There is a goal for this organization, an objective, and that is to make sure that education for educators is the best experience it can possibly be; and in so doing, we benefit those children that we teach.... It became my objective to restore the joy of this profession for both educators and students."

Those who knew Ellis, know that his passion for his students was second only to his love for his family. Recently, Philo Middle School in Winston-Salem, where he returned to teach after completing his tenure as NCAE president, renamed a classroom in honor of his life and legacy. His daughter, Gabrielle, now occupies that room as a teacher. "It's unique that I'm able to be right in his classroom, doing something that was important to him," she said. "I know he'd be proud."